



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE INDEPENDENT PRESS: ITS OPPORTUNITIES AND DUTIES.*

BY SAMUEL BOWLES, EDITOR OF "THE SPRINGFIELD REPUBLICAN."

"Here shall the Press the People's cause maintain,
Unawed by Influence and unbribed by Gain."

SUCH was the noble motto which a famous Massachusetts judge wrote for a newspaper in Salem many years ago. Does the average man, or even the exceptionally informed and intelligent man, realize how difficult it is for the press under modern conditions to fulfil its highest and most important function thus admirably expressed? The development of the news service of the great American newspapers has, of itself, made them at last politically independent. It has come to pass that a party organ of the old-fashioned type cannot now be successfully maintained; but the political thralldom of the press has been succeeded by a commercial thralldom more insidious and more dangerous to the welfare of society. The cheap newspaper of many pages, selling often at wholesale for less than the cost of the paper on which it is printed, is dominated by the advertiser, who pays all of the other heavy expenses and the profit. Nevertheless, in spite of the obstacles and the limitations which attend its service, speaking broadly, the press does still stand for the rights and interests of the people. In fact, it represents them, on the whole, more efficiently than ever before. It does this, not so much by its editorial opposition or advocacy, as by its publication of news, its daily presentation of each day's history of the whole world, the record not merely of events but of thought, opinion, discovery. The marvel of this achievement is not less because we no longer think of it. Even the corrupt and dependent press is compelled to

* This article formed a part of an address delivered before the State University at Columbia, Missouri, May 4, 1906.

publish the news. It cannot hope to exist if it fails to do so. The possession of the news, the knowledge of the world's daily life, thought, movement, constitutes the most effective weapon for the protection of society. Justice and truth flourish in the light of publicity. Iniquity and wrong dread it and are ultimately cured by the influences which flow from its illuminating rays.

It is often lightly remarked that the newspapers have lost their influence, that nobody cares what they have to say, that the great editors whose utterances commanded respect and guided the political actions of large and loyal constituencies are all dead and have no successors. It is true that the commanding personalities who dominated certain editorial pages have disappeared, that the character of the newspaper has changed, but the ability of the press to affect public sentiment through its news columns has made it a greater power than ever. The modern editorial page, moreover, is a most important part of the news-giving mechanism of the press. Its function is to illuminate, to suggest, to inform, to expose, rather than to persuade or denounce. The annual oration before the Phi Beta Kappa society at Harvard University in 1904 dealt ably and justly with the newspaper, and in opening it the speaker, Congressman Samuel W. McCall of Massachusetts, said: "We tax ourselves enormously to support schools and colleges, and carefully discuss systems of education, and yet the press as a practical educating force for good or evil is hardly second to any other agency." No candid, informed and observant man will deny the truth of that statement.

Recognizing clearly, then, the tremendous power in a free state of the modern, news-giving press, throwing its search-light fearlessly and vigorously in all directions, consider its inspiring opportunities and sobering responsibilities, and also the responsibilities of society in relation to the press. Think for a moment of the conditions of our lives as citizens of the great American republic. The new achievements in the manufacture of power and the application of power, the engineers tell us, have developed a new epoch, a period distinguished by its marvellous material advancement, its increase in human comforts and conveniences, its expansion of human interests and pleasures. There are two significant features of this new life which command our attention and with increasingly insistent force will command our ac-

tion for the sake of self-protection. One is our growing dependence upon each other, not merely for our welfare, but for existence itself. In our modern closely interrelated society the failure of any class, even of the individual under many circumstances, to perform their or his part in the social economy involves disorder, discomfort, suffering, aye perhaps even death itself to hundreds, thousands,—it may be, as in the case of a great coal strike, to millions—of innocent and more or less helpless persons. The growth of population, the increasing disposition of people to gather into towns and cities, the new methods of co-operation and specialization which have been introduced into our domestic affairs, the intimate relations of mutual service which now exist between individuals, industrial classes, communities, sections, nations, all emphasize the lesson of our universal dependence upon others, the duty of consideration for our fellows, the vital importance of social harmony.

The other impressive and portentous feature of our American economic system thus far is the substantial control of our great lines of transportation and communication, upon which the welfare of the nation depends, by private capital, for private profit. Influenced by our inherited love for individual freedom and respect for individual enterprise and leadership, incited also by our thirst for personal gain and our eager demand for quick achievement, we have given over to groups of individuals, organized in corporate form and strongly led, great privileges and opportunities inhering in the people themselves, without adequate public control or recompense. The result has been the development of a combined private property interest which dominates, if it does not control, the government, and threatens to make a hollow sham of our democratic institutions,—an interest avowedly created and conducted for the public service, but administered, broadly speaking, with notorious injustice and partiality, promoting the acquirement of enormous private fortunes which are in themselves a menace to the nation. We have allowed our tariff laws, theoretically designed for the sustainment of the people's government and the development and enrichment of the entire nation, to be perverted to the advantage of individuals and the production of private wealth so fabulous that its possession is a depressing burden to its owners, and its distribution by gift is attended with a pauperizing and debilitating influence

upon the communities and institutions which seek to be its beneficiaries. We have permitted capitalists and laboring men, respectively, to combine among themselves for a common selfish advantage with a practically free hand, but whenever there has been a movement on the part of the citizens of any community or state to combine to serve themselves, to do their own business as it were, the cry has been raised that such undertakings were impracticable, undemocratic and an improper encroachment upon a field that should be reserved for individual enterprise.

But a new light is breaking, a new spirit of democracy is having birth, a new consciousness of power is coming to the people, a new determination to assert and maintain their liberty. And the fundamental principle at the bottom of this movement is the human brotherhood taught by the Divine Master, which is, after all, the basis of just, true, honest democratic government and which must be more and more realized if our great experiment in democracy is to stand the test of time. In spite of the marked materialistic tendencies of the age, the common striving for wealth and the worship of wealth, there has never been a period in the history of the world when the social conscience was so active, so sensitive, as it is to-day, when the forces making for righteousness were so numerous and so potential. It is the self-protecting obligation and opportunity of our democratic society to unify and utilize these forces in procuring a greater measure of justice in the distribution of wealth, in promoting a deeper sense of social solidarity, in spiritualizing, as it were, for the common good, the common advancement, the material gains and powers that science and engineering are achieving. Art and beauty are no longer to be reserved for a favored class, but are more and more to be coupled with practical utility in public works and in private construction under public regulation, and are to be exemplified in countless ways for the enjoyment and elevation of all mankind. The essence of such a revitalized, modernized democracy is the civic spirit, the common readiness to serve and cooperate. Our present political and social ills are due in the last analysis to our own neglect, our own short-sighted, narrow selfishness as citizens. We are to cultivate a broader view, an enlightened selfishness, if you please, an understanding that democratic government is what we make it, and that it will not be clean and honest and just until we put those qualities into it

with incessant interest and watchfulness and service. We are to realize, too, that the responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic state are far greater in these days than ever before, that they comprehend our obligations to our families and transcend our duties to any particular class or order of society. The principle of competition, or individual action, is still to play its vital part in the progress of humanity, but recognition that the individual and class interests are to bend when the common interest is at stake is now an essential element in a happy social order.

Under such conditions and demands of our professedly democratic society, how important the agency of the press, how vital to progress its honest and intelligent service! Is it not clear that the first principle of such service is an absolute devotion to the public interests? When the individual citizen neglects his civic duties, the community and state suffer; but when the newspaper, with its exceptional facilities for influence, is derelict or prostitutes its powers, the effect is far-reaching and momentous. It is obviously the pretence of every newspaper, seeking public support, that it stands for the public enlightenment and welfare. Even though it have no editorial opinions to express, and be simply an organ of information, it professes to publish things that are true and to be so far an honest servant of those who buy it. It is, then, a national misfortune that so large a section of the American press, under the operation of commercial influences, has been led into the adoption of methods and practices which are essentially dishonest. I refer especially to the exaggerations and misrepresentations which characterize the so-called "yellow press." The predominant tone of this class of journal is a painful and distressing scream which manifests itself in dreadful typographical effects, and to which the advertisers are encouraged to add their discordant notes.

Such newspapers are a disgrace to modern civilization. Nevertheless, they have an influence and following, not, as I believe, because of these methods, but in spite of them. They particularly appeal to the poor and lowly, and exhibit, often with skill, a real or pretended sympathy with the causes of the masses, whom they are able to reach through their low-selling price. It is not, however, necessary that a newspaper should be ugly and repulsive in physical appearance, or dishonest in its manner of

presenting the news, in order to attain large circulation and financial prosperity. On the contrary, there are happily in this country examples of low-priced and thoroughly popular journals which are clean and attractive in their make-up, and honest and honorable in their service of their readers.

A first essential to the adequate fulfilment of its avowed function in the news-giving press is honest art and genuine proportion in its construction. It is the work poorly done that retards the world. The newspapers slovenly, dishonestly, crudely made, are those that conspicuously fail in their pretended public service and tend to become degrading and harmful influences. Whatever principles he may advocate on his editorial page, the newspaper-maker is bound in honor and by every just consideration of his calling to treat his readers in good faith and with respect. He certainly cannot afford to disregard the interests of his advertisers; but, when the rights of the readers are subordinated or submerged to meet the short-sighted demands of the advertisers, the newspaper becomes so far simply a lie. Such a policy persisted in defeats itself, and the newspaper produced simply or principally to carry advertising, ultimately becomes of very little value to its commercial patrons. So in respect to the unrestrained, intemperate use of scare head-lines and the faking of sensational news; these practices may win temporarily in the game; but, in the long run, they are poor business investments, and of course they are shamelessly dishonest.

The true policy for the newspaper-maker, as indeed for every other manufacturer, is to produce a good and attractive article by honest, open methods, to harness brains, incessant energy, human sympathy, art, trained judgment, knowledge, patience to his honest purpose, and he may then safely await the issue in public confidence and support. If it is the duty of every live man to do good work in the world, that responsibility rests especially on the journalist because of his exceptional opportunities, powers, and professions. He should seek to make his daily output interesting, individual, helpful, stimulating, productive of better living and saner, sounder thinking by his readers. If his business is in one sense that of a manufacturer, in another and higher and broader sense it is like unto that of the learned professions, law, medicine, the ministry; and it should be conducted in conformity to the standards which are supposed to rule in those callings.

The journalist has one client, one patient, one flock—that is to say, the whole community; and nothing should stand in the way of his single-minded and devoted service of that one common interest. He should beware of all entangling alliances—political, social, commercial—which may limit or embarrass such service. He should let the honors and emoluments of public office go to other people. His own office, if properly administered, is more important and powerful than any that his fellow citizens are likely to confer upon him. The independent newspaper may be and should be the most vital and effective instrument that democratic society can produce for its own advancement and protection; and its true business welfare, in the long view, lies in a complete, intelligent, sympathetic devotion to public interests.

It is but just to remark, however, that society has its own grave responsibilities toward the press. The newspaper and its human environment inevitably act and react upon each other; and, in large measure, it is true that the press is but an expression of the society which it undertakes to serve. How important, then, that educated men and women in free America should sustain the independent, honest press and help to make it better by their intelligent criticisms, sympathetic cooperation, responsive service and just demands!

At the beautiful opening service of the International Peace Congress of 1904, held in Symphony Hall, Boston, an inspiring address was made by the Bishop of Hereford, England, which contained this passage:

“Such is that spirit of commercial militarism which has spread through a great part of the political life of Europe like some dangerous epidemic disease. If it should threaten to invade your country, my prayer is that you may escape the danger and be true to your destiny as a great democracy inspired and ruled by the spirit of industrious and generous peace.”

The phrase “industrious peace” caught my fancy and stirred my imagination. Think of what it means, of what it implies in its full and far significance. It is my hope, my ambition, that the independent newspapers of the United States shall become, as the years roll on, more and more truly apostles of an industrious peace, not only for the sake of the highest and best development of this nation, both spiritually and materially, but for the advancement of liberty, justice and enlightened democratic government throughout the world.

SAMUEL BOWLES.